

JUN 3 1964

## Foreign Affairs

### Alone With Our Asian Crisis

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PARIS—Whatever the U.S. Government decides to do about Indochina need not be too carefully strained through the fabric of our SEATO alliance. For, if SEATO ever truly existed as a coherent pact, it certainly doesn't exist today.

When Foster Dulles fathered SEATO a decade ago he admitted its principal purpose was to provide our President legal authority to intervene in Indochina. But Dulles had strange visions concerning the pact's other implications.

He thought it would assure us active allies in a vital area. He fancied SEATO was one of three connected Oriental bastions, directly linked to South Korean and Formosan strongpoints. Our allies never accepted this tidy assumption.

Dulles also had misconceptions concerning French and U.S. commitments in Indochina, over which SEATO unilaterally extended its protection. On Feb. 22, 1955, the late Secretary of State told me in Bangkok, on the eve of a SEATO conference:

"The French have a substantial military force in South Vietnam. That is France's principal role. The Geneva [1954 partition] accord bars the importation into Indochina of new military aid. The U.S.A. can't increase the number of its military advisers. That places a strong dependence on France."

On Feb. 25, when SEATO's meeting had ended, Dulles added: "We are operating on a basis where more and more we treat atomic weapons as conventional. It doesn't make sense to use 100 shots or bombs to do exactly the same job as one atomic weapon and it is much more expensive. Throughout history there has been a steady development of more powerful explosives."

#### Where Dulles Erred

Dulles was wrong in all his SEATO observations save the Congressional blank check given the President. He was wrong in linking SEATO with South Korea and Formosa, which the other allies wouldn't accept. He was wrong about the position of France. He was wrong about the freeze on U.S. "military advisers" and nuclear deterrence.

SEATO never checked Communist subversion and it never produced an alliance community or forces structure. France is militarily out of the area; France and Pakistan are diplomatically disengaged. Laos has been removed from SEATO protection, and neutralized in theory; in fact it is being devoured by Communist forces. Cambodia professes to consider SEATO a greater danger than China. And a U.S. military mission moved into South Vietnam three years ago and has been growing ever since.

If we are going to try to save Southeast Asia from Communist control we are going to have to do so virtually alone. France won't help; Britain will only go along to the degree that we back its Malaysian experiment against Indonesia. Pakistan considers India, which we arm, more menacing than China.

SEATO was a classic example of closing the barn door on a missing horse. In this case the horse was the Anglo-French empire. SEATO was written on the assumption of British and French armed strength that didn't exist.

France and Britain, increasingly excluded from Asia as military powers, feel diminishing interest in the area. They admit Asia is strategically important, but less vital to the West than the Atlantic world. The SEATO allies have no passion for the kind of holy war the U.S.A. wishes to carry on against China.

These are the uncomfortable facts concerning our Southeast Asian crisis. We got into South Vietnam to save that rump state despite both the spirit and the letter of the 1954 Geneva accord that created it. And we based our commitment on the assumption of continued French and British military strength that was then already disappearing.

During the pactomania phase of American policy-making, we allowed ourselves to be deceived by shadowy illusions. We believed such organizations as SEATO and CENTO were realities, but they weren't.

We must therefore face the problem of salvaging our Indochina crisis on the bases of what we consider right. There is no point allowing ourselves to be bound, for example, by Paris' insistence that while France will fight for Berlin, it won't fight for Saigon. In Southeast Asia we must honor our commitments and respect our interests. Confusion cannot be coordinated.